United Nations S/2005/380

Security Council

Distr.: General
10 June 2005

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999), by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report to it on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). Subsequently, in paragraph 11 of Security Council resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report to it every three months.

2. This report focuses on developments since my last report (S/2005/174 of 16 March 2005), particularly on the state of preparations for the presidential elections scheduled for 19 June 2005, which, according to the Political Transition Charter, should mark the full restoration of constitutional order.

II. Political situation

3. The period under review was dominated by the preparations for the forthcoming presidential elections in a highly polarized atmosphere, largely due to the legal controversies surrounding the eligibility of the two former Presidents, João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira and Koumba Yala, who had decided to stand for the 19 June elections.

4. Following his nomination by the Party of Social Renewal (PRS) on 26 March to run in the forthcoming presidential election, Mr. Yala filed his candidacy with the Supreme Court in spite of the provision of the Political Transition Charter of September 2003 banning his participation in political activities for five years. Mr. Yala threatened to take power by force should he be prevented from running. For his part, on returning to Guinea-Bissau on 7 April 2005 for the first time since his overthrow in a coup in 1999, Mr. Vieira was welcomed by scores of his supporters, including a section of the governing African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). Meanwhile, the level of social dissatisfaction continued to be high, as demonstrated in mid-April by a strike of teachers to protest the non-payment of salaries.

05-37357 (E) 140605

5. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS continued to promote dialogue among national stakeholders. In particular, the Office organized a series of meetings and workshops with political parties, signatories of the Transition Charter, civil society and the media, with the assistance of skilled facilitators from both national and international non-governmental organizations. The Office will conduct a series of training workshops on negotiation and conflict management skills for major actors immediately following the presidential elections. In addition, UNOGBIS continued to encourage regular contacts between the Government and the military leadership.

6. The permanent dialogue that UNOGBIS maintains with leaders of the armed and security forces and the assistance it provides for the reconciliation process within the armed forces have helped build a reasonable degree of mutual trust, raise the awareness of the military leadership regarding its obligations and strengthen its commitment to defend the authorities of the State.

7. However, since tensions in the country remained high, I decided to appoint, on 29 April 2005, the former President of Mozambique, Joaquim Alberto Chissano, as my Special Envoy for Guinea-Bissau. His role is to facilitate the holding of peaceful and credible elections and to help bring the ongoing transition to a successful conclusion, thus leading to the restoration of constitutional order.

8. During his nine-day mission from 2 to 10 May 2005, Mr. Chissano held a series of meetings with all the actors involved in the electoral process, including the authorities of the State, other national stakeholders, the signatories of the Political Transition Charter and former Presidents Yala and Vieira. Mr. Chissano expressed to all main actors the concern of the international community about the situation in the country and the hope that Guinea-Bissau would do everything possible to hold peaceful and credible elections. He also urged all his Guinea-Bissau interlocutors to promote dialogue and to abide by the ruling of the Supreme Court on the eligibility of presidential candidates. Most importantly, my Special Envoy received an unequivocal commitment from the leaders of the armed forces that they would remain neutral in the political process and would subordinate themselves to the civilian authorities and to the rule of law.

9. On 3 May 2005, the Chief of General Staff, General Tagme Na Waie, issued a press statement reaffirming the commitment of the armed forces to respect the Constitution and not to interfere in the electoral process. A similar commitment was reflected in a statement issued by the Ministry of Defence on 16 May 2005, following a meeting between the Government and the military hierarchy.

10. In a decision announced on 18 May 2005, the Supreme Court validated the applications of 17 of the 21 candidates, including former Presidents Yala and Vieira, former Prime Ministers Francisco Fadul and Faustino Imbali, and Malam Bacai Sanha, the interim President in 1999. Although some national actors criticized the Supreme Court's ruling, stressing that it was not strictly based on interpretation of the law, but on political considerations and the fear of violence, the Court's ruling was nevertheless accepted by Guinea-Bissau society at large.

11. Mr. Chissano's mission helped calm the political climate. However, tensions arose again, on 15 May 2005, when Mr. Yala stated that the Court's decision to allow him to stand had created a constitutional power vacuum in Guinea-Bissau and that, consequently, he had decided to resume his presidential term and postpone the elections.

12. In reaction, the current authorities reaffirmed the Government's commitment to hold presidential elections as scheduled, while the Chairman of the Military Committee publicly pledged his allegiance to President Pereira Rosa. On 17 May 2005, thousands of young schoolchildren and students, led by their teachers, took part in a "march for peace", which ended peacefully. At the same time, an unauthorized demonstration of Mr. Yala's supporters later that day was dispersed by police. Similar marches for peace were held in the interior of the country.

13. I have continued to work with the leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) and encouraged them to continue efforts to help complete the ongoing transition peacefully and restore constitutional order to the country. On 21 May 2005, President Obasanjo of Nigeria and current Chairperson of the AU, President Tandja of the Niger and current Chairperson of ECOWAS, President Wade of Senegal, Prime Minister Diallo of the Republic of Guinea and the ECOWAS Executive Secretary, Mr. Chambas, visited Bissau to assess the situation in the country and to meet with key national stakeholders on the forthcoming presidential elections. The AU/ECOWAS delegation requested all candidates to play a positive role during the electoral process and accept the election results. In the meantime, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) appointed a permanent representative for Guinea-Bissau, who was expected to arrive in the country on 10 June 2005.

14. Following Mr. Yala's reported attempt, on 25 May 2005, to occupy one of the buildings of the presidential compound, which he later denied, the President of Guinea-Bissau, the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission issued statements reaffirming their commitment to hold the elections as scheduled. An electoral needs assessment mission that I dispatched to Guinea-Bissau from 18 to 25 May 2005 concluded that the necessary technical conditions were in place for the holding of the first round of elections. At the request of the Government, UNOGBIS stands ready to coordinate between 100 and 200 international observers to ensure coverage of elections throughout the country. On 28 May 2005, the official candidates, Malam Bacai Sanha of PAIGC, Koumba Yala of PRS and Francisco Fadul of the United Social Democratic Party (PUSD), among others, began their electoral campaign in Bissau.

15. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS continued to coordinate closely with the United Nations system and the ECOWAS and CPLP executive secretariats. In particular, the Office provided logistical support to ECOWAS while it was setting up its permanent mission in Bissau and is ready to provide similar support to CPLP.

16. With regard to the funding of the 19 June elections, by the end of May, donors had committed over €2.6 million through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) technical assistance project and/or in direct support to the Government. The amount includes $400,000 from UNDP, €200,000 from the Netherlands, €1,500,000 from the European Commission, $500,000 from Algeria through ECOWAS, $350,000 from Portugal, $100,000 from China, €229,000 from the Central Bank of West African States, €229,000 from the West African Development Bank and €762,000 from the West African Economic and Monetary Union. Portugal provided all the electoral materials, while Brazil contributed computers and technical assistance.

17. On its part, the European Union has also committed up to €1.5 million to cover the costs of its Election Observation Mission, which is already deployed in Guinea-Bissau.

III. Economic and social aspects

18. Economic conditions remain critical, but the Government has continued to make further improvement in fiscal management. The budget deficit is now estimated at €36.9 million, including the salary arrears from 2004. On the positive side, revenue collection for the period from January to April 2005 exceeded forecasts by 70 per cent and, with the assistance of the UNDP-managed Economic Emergency Management Fund (EEMF), the salaries of civil servants for April 2005 were paid. EEMF was replenished during the period under review through contributions of €1 million from the Government of Portugal on behalf of CPLP and €500,000 from France, but the budget gap still stood at $16 million at the end of May.

19. Throughout the period under review, international financial institutions continued to be constructively engaged with Guinea-Bissau. The International Monetary Fund is scheduled to send a mission late in June to assess the ongoing Staff Monitored Programme with the national authorities. Approval of the Programme is crucial for the Government, so that the Programme can be transformed into an emergency post-conflict assistance programme.

20. As a follow-up to the World Bank high-level missions in the first quarter of this year, a World Bank pre-identification mission visited Guinea-Bissau in May 2005 in connection with the proposed $20 million credit to finance urban communications, water and energy projects. Also in May, a World Bank multidisciplinary mission visited the country to assess plans for the budgetary support, poverty assessment and infrastructure projects.

21. With regard to budgetary support, given the difficulties currently confronting the National Treasury, the European Commission decided to grant an advance on its 2005 payment under the European Commission/Guinea-Bissau fishery protocol, which represents the country's single most important source of income. This advance payment of €5 million was released on 22 April 2005 on the basis of the result of a joint European Commission/Guinea-Bissau review covering the implementation of the sectoral fisheries policy reforms and the supporting measures. The remainder of the annual contribution (€2.26 million) is due to be released in June 2005.

22. As part of the ongoing process to strengthen humanitarian coordination mechanisms, the United Nations country team requested the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to send an adviser to Guinea-Bissau. The adviser will work with the inter-agency working group for emergency preparedness and response to help revise the contingency plan and set up an early warning and monitoring system.

23. The World Bank has launched a three-year HIV/AIDS project for $7 million aimed at building national capacity to respond to the epidemic, reduce its spread and increase access to treatment. As part of a cooperation agreement between Guinea-Bissau and Cuba, 30 Cuban doctors and 24 Cuban-trained doctors from Guinea-

Bissau arrived in Guinea-Bissau in May and are being deployed to regions in which infant and childbirth mortality are high. Portugal signed two accords for €200,000 and €282,600 respectively, towards the rehabilitation of health and education facilities.

24. In a move to halt an epidemic of anthrax in the region of Oio in northern Guinea-Bissau at the end of April, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs launched a coordinated appeal to partners in the West African region for an emergency vaccination campaign. The epidemic might have a disastrous effect on the economy of Oio, which depends on livestock farming.

IV. Military and security aspects

25. The process of reconciliation and reintegration of the different military factions has continued. The armed forces Commission on Reconciliation and Reintegration, set up by the Chief of General Staff, held a series of awareness-raising meetings in all regions and barracks between 28 February and 6 April 2005. UNOGBIS provided logistical support for the Commission and participated in all the meetings to promote the idea and the content of a comprehensive reform. Participants stressed the importance of reintegration and dialogue. They called for an amnesty based on justice and transparency, the reorganization and restructuring of the armed forces and the compilation of a database in preparation for a future reform. The meetings resulted in a request for further technical advice and the provision of reference materials to help the armed forces formulate concrete reform proposals.

26. There has also been some progress in completing a census in the security sector. A census conducted by the military forces in May 2005 concluded that there are 5,100 military personnel in active service. The Ministry of Public Administration has also completed two censuses of the police, border guards and customs officials based in Bissau. The sensitization exercise for officials outside Bissau is expected to resume after the election.

27. Following the formalization of arrangements to enable interested Member States to provide contributions for security sector reforms through the UNDP Thematic Trust Fund for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, an agreement was signed with the Government of Brazil for the contribution of $500,000. Discussions are under way with the Government to formulate projects that will benefit from this contribution.

28. A fact-finding mission on small arms that I dispatched to Bissau from 7 to 11 March 2005 has developed a project proposal, consisting of two main components: (a) assistance towards the establishment of a national small arms commission, which will spearhead national efforts to address the problem and will facilitate cooperation and coordination of efforts between the Government and civil society on the issue of small arms; and (b) execution of a pilot small arms collection and destruction programme in the city of Bissau. The project is also aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Government and relevant national NGOs to deal with the issue of illicit small arms. Resource mobilization for the implementation of this project is under way.

29. The level of criminality in Guinea-Bissau remains relatively low. However, seizures of illicit weapons and cocaine suggest an increase in organized crime operators. In this regard, the Police Commissioner has expressed concern about the State's lack of resources, which hampers the ability of the police to control the country's porous borders and territorial waters and to combat effectively all forms of cross-border trafficking.

V. Human rights aspects

30. The reporting period witnessed some improvement regarding civil and political rights, although the enjoyment of economic and social rights remains stifled due to the prevailing socio-economic crisis. No arbitrary detentions have been recorded for this period, and UNOGBIS continued to encourage the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ratify a number of human rights conventions so that Guinea-Bissau can have a complete human rights plan. The Office also continued working with national human rights NGOs to promote a culture of human rights. As a result, awareness of international human rights standards has increased among both the human rights network and other participants in human rights activities.

31. UNOGBIS also continued monitoring detention centres in Bissau. Its earlier recommendations in relation to the maintenance of a register and treatment of detainees have been implemented, but the detention conditions remain poor owing to lack of funds.

32. With regard to the issue of the general amnesty for all persons involved in coups d'état from independence, in 1974, to October 2004, the National Assembly referred the matter to the Parliamentary Commission on National Reconciliation and the Committee for Legal and Constitutional Affairs. To promote a better understanding of the legal aspects of the proposed amnesty, UNOGBIS partially funded a two-day seminar organized by civil society organizations on the subject.

VI. Observations

33. Recent tensions over the preparations for the presidential elections on 19 June demonstrate that peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau remain fragile and require the continued engagement of all key national and international actors.

34. I am encouraged by the renewed commitment of the national authorities to ensure the holding of the elections on schedule. I call on all the candidates to do their utmost to ensure a peaceful election and to accept the results. I urge all national actors to continue to support efforts by the Government to meet the serious challenges confronting the country. In this connection, I wish to commend the increasingly important role of the country's network of NGOs, which has shown potential to positively influence change.

35. I welcome the process of reconciliation within the armed forces and the increasingly republican attitude adopted by the military. I also welcome the reaffirmation by the military leadership of its subordination to civilian authority and commend the initiative of the Chief of General Staff to sensitize the armed forces on the value of and need for reconciliation and military restructuring.

36. The reform of the security and public administration sectors remains a necessary condition for the promotion of sustainable peace and stability in the country. In order to facilitate such reform, it is essential to provide for staff retraining and the creation of social safety nets. In this regard, the role of the country's development partners is crucial in creating the socio-economic conditions necessary to provide these safety nets and a propitious economic environment.

37. I commend all the partners of Guinea-Bissau for their support for the country at this difficult juncture of the transition. I call on them to continue providing much-needed support to help Guinea-Bissau move towards full rehabilitation and recovery.

38. I would like to encourage AU, ECOWAS, CPLP and Guinea-Bissau's other partners to continue their critical role in promoting peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau. Together, we should convey a common message of support to the national authorities and other stakeholders in their efforts to complete the transition on schedule and to move towards lasting peace and sustainable development.

39. Guinea-Bissau continues to face tremendous political, social and economic challenges, the resolution of which requires a common vision and sense of purpose, peace and stability. To help meet these challenges, UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team have concluded the review of the United Nations comprehensive peacebuilding strategy for Guinea-Bissau, which combines peace, security and development agendas and defines activities to be implemented in support of the country's efforts to improve political dialogue, security, democratic and economic governance and resource mobilization. In this regard, I would like to encourage the Council to finalize its response to my recommendations contained in my report of 16 March 2005 (S/2005/174) to strengthen UNOGBIS and to enable it to meet the requirements of its revised mandate as set out in Security Council resolution 1580 (2004).

40. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of UNOGBIS, led by my Representative in Guinea-Bissau João Bernardo Honwana, and the entire United Nations country team for their persistent efforts, often under difficult circumstances, in support of the will of the Government and the people of Guinea-Bissau to complete the transition peacefully and restore constitutional order.